

## REMARKS

As amended, Claims 55-75 remain pending and active in the above-identified application. Claims 55-58, 60-64, 66-67 and 69-70 have been amended and Claims 76-77 are new.

Claims 55-75 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being obvious over U.S. Patent No. 4,813,948 to Insley. For the following reasons, applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Independent Claim 55, as amended, from which the balance of the rejected claims ultimately depend, recites the step of "binding the superabsorbent particles to the binder-containing cellulose fiber." Applicants assert that Insley '948 does not teach or suggest the step of "binding the superabsorbent particles to the binder-containing cellulose fiber."

The discussion in Insley '948 regarding binding absorbent particles (such as superabsorbent particles) relates to binding of such particles to melt blown microfiber microwebs, but not to cellulose fibers. Insley at column 4, lines 8-10, describes:

The microfiber web is preferably formed by melt blowing a thermoplastic fiber forming polymer.

Further on, Insley at column 6, lines 3-19, describes the microfibers as follows:

The microfibers useful in forming the microfiber microwebs of the invention may be melt blown or they may be formed from solution when the microfiber source web is prepared without incorporated particulate material. When the microfiber source web is formed with incorporated particulate material, the microfibers are preferably melt blown. The melt blown microfibers of the microfiber microwebs may be formed from a wide variety of fiber-forming polymeric materials. Such polymeric materials include, for example, polyolefins, such as polypropylene and

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polyethylene, polyesters, such as polyethylene terephthalate, and polyamides, such as nylon 6 and nylon 66. Useful polymers for forming microfibers from solution include polyvinyl chloride, acrylics and acrylic copolymers, polystyrene, and polysulfone. Inorganic materials also form useful microfibers.

The examples of Insley '948 disclose the formation of a microfiber microweb only from polypropylene microfibers--which do not form hydrogen bonds and are not cellulose fibers.

As noted above, the Insley '948 patent does not disclose binding superabsorbent particles to a binder containing cellulose fiber. The particles of Insley '948 are bound to melt blown microfibers as described above. No reason is apparent why it would be obvious to modify the express disclosure of the Insley '948 patent to bind superabsorbent particles to cellulose fibers. The Insley '948 patent therefore fails to disclose or suggest one element of the present invention of Claims 55-57 and 59-75--that is, binding superabsorbent particles to binder-containing cellulose fibers.

For the foregoing reasons, applicants assert that the subject matter recited in independent Claim 55, as amended, and the claims that depend therefrom are not obvious over the Insley '948 patent because the Insley '948 patent does not teach or suggest a limitation recited in the claim.

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If the Examiner has any questions regarding the foregoing, he is invited to call applicants' attorney at the number listed below so that any outstanding issues can be resolved in a timely and efficient manner.

Respectfully submitted,

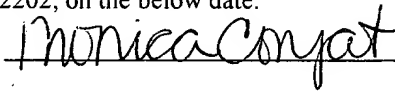
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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the U.S. Postal Service in a sealed envelope as first-class mail with postage thereon fully prepaid and addressed to BOX RCE, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, P.O. Box 2327, Arlington, VA 22202, on the below date.

Date: January 25, 2002  
JMS/mc



VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE JANUARY 25, 2002

In the Claims:

Claims 76 and 77 have been added.

55. (Twice Amended) A method of binding superabsorbent particles to cellulose fibers comprising the steps of:

providing binder-containing cellulose fiber, the binder-containing cellulose fiber comprising cellulose fiber having hydrogen bonding functional sites and a binder comprising a non-polymeric binder having functional groups selected from the group consisting of a carboxyl, a carboxylate, a carbonyl, a sulfonic acid, a sulfonate, a hydroxyl, a phosphoric acid, a phosphate, an amide, an amine, and combinations thereof, the binder comprising binder molecules, the binder molecules having at least one functional group capable of forming a hydrogen bond or a coordinate covalent bond with the superabsorbent particles, and at least one functional group capable of forming a hydrogen bond with the cellulose fiber;

combining superabsorbent particles having a hydrogen or a coordinate covalent bonding functional site with the binder-containing cellulose fiber; and

binding the superabsorbent particles to the binder-containing cellulose fiber.

56. (Amended) The method of Claim 55, wherein the nonpolymeric organic binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1 to 40% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

57. (Amended) The method of Claim 55, wherein the nonpolymeric organic binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1 to 25% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

58. (Amended) The method of Claim 55, wherein the cellulose fiber comprises [cellulose]wood pulp fiber.

60. (Amended) The method of Claim 59, wherein the binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1-40% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

61. (Amended) The method of Claim 59, wherein the binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1-25% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

63. (Amended) The method of Claim 62, wherein the binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1-40% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

64. (Amended) The method of Claim 62, wherein the binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1-25% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

66. (Amended) The method of Claim 65, wherein the binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount from 1-40% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

67. (Amended) The method of Claim 65, wherein the binder is present on the cellulose fiber in an amount ranging from 1-25% by weight based on the weight of the cellulose fiber.

69. (Amended) The method of Claim 55, wherein the combining step comprises adding superabsorbent particles in an amount ranging from 1-80% by weight of the total weight of the superabsorbent particles and cellulose fiber.

70. (Amended) The method of Claim 55, wherein the combining step comprises adding superabsorbent particles in an amount ranging from 3-40% by weight of the total weight of the superabsorbent particles and cellulose fiber.